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# Qumran in its Heyday: Period Ib

We have already seen that period Ib was ushered in by a substantial enlargement of the settlement necessitated by an increase in numbers. We shall see presently how the way of life at Qumran changed as a result: but first let us ask what caused the influx of new members, and what sort of men they may have been. We may rule out any large-scale religious conversion or change in fashion which brought a life of loneliness and hardship and strict discipline into vogue. The answer must rather lie in developments within Jewish society outside Qumran which prompted some to escape to a place of relative security.

A widely-held opinion, which follows this line of reasoning, holds that such refugees were Pharisees. According to Josephus, John Hyrcanus, ruler and High Priest from 134–104 BC, fell out with the Pharisees, apparently because of their opposition to his tenure of the High Priestly office. As a result of his displeasure, many Pharisees may have been driven to seek refuge at Qumran. Whether by so doing they would have placed themselves out of his effective reach is doubtful, for the ruler had a fortress, called Hyrcanion, only eight miles from Qumran and within easy reach across the Buqei'a. But at Qumran the refugees might be considered to have put themselves outside the orbit of Jewish society and therefore to be of no further threat to Hyrcanus. The quarrel, as described by Josephus, coincided with the beginning of period Ib at Qumran, and the view that the Essenes and the Pharisees were descendants of the same religious group allows that Qumran would have been a plausible refuge.

This theory is certainly attractive. But as we have already argued, there are difficulties in holding that Essenes and Pharisees were related; in calendar, temple worship and interpretation of law there are as many differences as similarities. The circumstances are better explained on the theory that the new arrivals at Qumran were themselves Essenes. If the Pharisees incurred Hyrcanus' wrath for opposing his High Priesthood, it is likely that the Essenes, whose opposition was probably even more fundamental, were also jeopardised by the quarrel which took place. If, as we have suggested, there were Essenes living throughout the land at this time, Qumran would have

afforded an obvious choice of retreat, and their arrival would create little impact on the life and ideals of the community.

The difference between the community of periods Ia and Ib is not simply one of size, however. By the end of Ia the Teacher was almost certainly dead, and with his death would have disappeared that charisma and authority which had created the community. Adjustments were made in the expectations of its members; we find in a passage from the *Damascus Rule* a calculation that the End will dawn forty years after the death of the Teacher. Many of the features of Qumran life during period Ib become clearer when the departure of the Teacher of Righteousness is taken into account. Let us consider these under three headings: structure and organisation, daily rituals, and economic life.

## Structure and organisation

To put it mildly, what the scrolls tell us about the organisation of the community is confusing. To begin with, we find legislation for the Qumran settlement and also for 'camps'. These camps have been taken to refer either to smaller groupings within the Qumran settlement – in which case the organisation at Qumran becomes nearly impossible to decipher – or to communities of Essenes outside Qumran. A third possibility is that the camps represent the organisation of Essenes at an earlier period of their history. In the last two instances, we should pay little attention to what is said about the camps if we want simply to know how the Qumran community was organised.

The first view is unlikely. It is improbable that at Qumran there would be two different orders of life, each with different structures and organisation. The *Community Rule*, which legislates for the Qumran community, stipulates smaller congregations of ten, but does not call them 'camps'; they are clearly part of the larger structure. Moreover, many of the laws governing the camps imply a community living within a non-Essene environment, including prohibitions against certain dealings with Gentiles. Such factors are more compatible with the second or third theories mentioned above.

As far as we are concerned, then, the 'camps' can be to a great extent left out of the picture, although in view of numerous points of contact with life at Qumran, the life of the camps may illuminate areas which the laws of Qumran leave dubious. We must also bear in mind, when using the evidence of Josephus or Philo about the Essenes, that it is possibly the camps which these authors are describing.

Let us in fact begin with the statement of Josephus that authority among

the Essenes rested with the 'overseers'. The Hebrew word in the scrolls which corresponds to Josephus' Greek is *mebaqqer*. (The Greek word is, in fact, *episkopos*, also the title of the early church's officer which became 'bishop'.) The *mebaqqer* carried responsibility for instructing new members, and had final authority in matters of belief and practice. It seems, therefore, that he corresponded to the *maskil* of period Ia, although there may have been more than one *mebaqqer*, since a 'mebaqqer over the work of the congregation' is mentioned. The title *maskil*, too, continues to be used, and a third name *paqid*, probably denotes the same office.

Josephus also mentions the Chief Priest as presiding over Essene meals. In the 'eschatological' (or 'theoretical') Qumran scrolls such as the *War Scroll*, the *Temple Scroll* and the *Messianic Rule* (or *Rule of the Congregation*) (1QSa), the Chief Priest is the supreme leader of Israel, at the head of the temple cult and, in 1QSa even superior to the Messiah of Israel. But what authority did the Chief Priest exert in the everyday affairs of the community? It is possible, of course, that he was also the *mebaqqer*. But a more attractive suggestion is that the Chief Priest and the *mebaqqer* jointly exercised a dual authority, perhaps corresponding to the ideal of post-exilic Judaism, of a messianic Chief Priest and a lay Messiah. This kind of leadership may be seen in the smaller groups, with a minimum of ten, to which the *Community Rule* refers. Each of these, it is laid down, must include a priest and one who 'studies the law continually regarding the right conduct of a man with his companion'. The latter figure may be the one elsewhere referred to as an 'interpreter of the law'. Of course, in neither case can we be sure that the second figure, the *mebaqqer* or the 'interpreter of the law', was a non-priestly individual. Indeed, most scholars would probably think otherwise. Perhaps we do better to confess that the confusion of offices in the Qumran texts is unlikely ever to be finally resolved.

We can observe some general trends in organisation, however; not only is the system more complex, it is also rather more democratic. Whereas in period Ia authority was vested in the *maskil* and the priests, we now discover a greater measure of authority vested in lay members. In a passage from the *Community Rule* which we take to be from period Ib, we read,

They (i.e. the community) shall separate from the congregation of the men of falsehood and shall unite, with respect to the Law and possessions, under the authority of the sons of Zadok, the Priests who keep the Covenant, *and of the multitude of the men of the Community who hold fast to the Covenant*. Every decision concerning doctrine, property, and justice shall be determined by them (1QS 5,2-3; *D.S.S.E.* p. 78, my italics).

Whether or not the words in italics have been added to an earlier rule which

originated in period Ia, (which seems quite likely), we have an extension of the legislative and theological authority beyond the priests to the laymen; indeed, to all the members of the community. Presumably, most decisions affecting the life of the community were now taken at a session or council of the community, which we shall describe presently, and whose existence we already know of in period Ia.

Some scholars believe that there existed at Qumran an inner council, consisting of fifteen men, twelve laymen and three priests. While this may be so, it is curious that we find only one unambiguous reference to this group, which is nowhere assigned any authority or any function. It is also possible, as others have suggested, that these fifteen men constituted the original nucleus of the community which established itself at Qumran. If this nucleus did once possess some authoritative status, this did not survive into period Ib. It is worth mentioning in passing that the various terms which the community used of itself occur in the scrolls in a way which defies logical synthesis or evolutionary reconstruction. 'Covenant', 'council', 'community' and 'congregation' – not to mention combinations of these terms – are in some cases obviously, and in most cases quite probably, synonymous.

The community during this period was structured in a rigid hierarchy, where every member had his own rank; this emerges clearly from the annual covenant ceremony, of which we shall say something in due course. There also appears, in the three 'theoretical' scrolls – the *War Scroll*, the *Temple Scroll* and the *Rule of the Congregation* – a system of military divisions into units of thousands hundreds, fifties and tens. This system is represented most fully in the *War Scroll*, where it becomes plain that the model is Numbers 1–10:10, describing the structure of the Israelites in the wilderness, prepared like a huge army for the invasion of the Promised Land. Surprisingly, many scholars have been content to include this system in their description of the organisation of the Qumran community, unaware of the obvious difficulties of applying it to a group of a few hundred. It is true that we find this structure in the description of the covenant ceremony in the *Community Rule*, on which occasion, it has been proposed, Essenes outside Qumran may have assembled at Qumran. But as presented in the *War Scroll*, where the organisation embraces the twelve tribes in a pan-Israelite context, the system quite probably belongs to Essene idealism rather than Essene practice. The fictitious list of treasures in the *Copper Scroll* should warn us of the danger of confusing real with ideal in the Qumran context.

The complexity of community organisation by this time is well brought out in the rules for admission of entrants. On this subject, the *Community Rule* confirms on the whole what Josephus says. The candidate first appeared

before the *'mebaqqer* at the head of the congregation', who considered both his 'understanding' and his 'deeds'. If these were found acceptable, the candidate was then admitted into the 'covenant' to learn all the rules of the community. At the end of this first period of probation the Council of the Congregation (probably the community in formal session) decided on his admission. A favourable decision led to his induction into the 'Council' (participation in sessions?), although he was not permitted to eat in communion with full members for a further year and until another examination. Nor, during this period, were his possessions reckoned with the communal property. After his understanding and observance of the Law had been tested, and on the authority of the priests and all the members, he entered the 'company' of the community, and his property was handed over. But still it was not contributed to the communal fund. The new member could now eat with the rest of the community, but not drink with them. This probably has to do with the doctrine that liquids were more easily contaminated by impurity than solids (as the rabbis also maintained). Finally, after yet another assessment by the congregation the new member was admitted fully, and was assigned a rank within the community. This rank was determined on the basis of his virtue in respect of 'Law, justice and the meal' – that is to say, his understanding of the Law as interpreted and obeyed by the community, his practical conduct towards fellow-members, and his observance of the requirements of purity. These three headings very well summarise the essence of life at Qumran.

All three of these, in fact, can be subsumed under the notion of holiness, the dominating theme of community life. Holiness involved not only scrupulous attention to the laws of Moses and the community's own regulations, but purity of thought and attitude. Concern to avoid contamination affected contact not only with outsiders but also with fellow-members. Josephus explains that a senior member (one of higher 'rank') would, if touched by a junior member, immediately bathe himself 'as if he had been in contact with a foreigner'. A similar if less rigorous attitude was adopted by strict Pharisees towards those Jews who did not observe the Law (including Pharisaic interpretations). In the same way we should understand the principle of communality of wealth at Qumran. Wealth could be contaminated by being mixed with the wealth of outsiders, or, as we have seen, of novitiates. It has been pointed out that this sharing of wealth has a parallel in early Christianity. According to John 13:19 Judas held the money-box for the disciples, and in Acts 2:44–45 we read that 'all who believed were together and had everything in common.' In the latter case, at least, the motives appear to be quite different from those of the Essenes, since the Christians sold their possessions and distributed their funds to the poor. There is no

evidence that the Essenes did likewise. Furthermore, whereas one infringement of the Christian rule, recorded in Acts 5:1ff., was punished by death, the punishment at Qumran for such an offence was only exclusion from the communal meal for one year and the loss of a quarter of rations.

Yet punishments were not as a rule lenient at Qumran, and many of the offences referred to appear trivial. By this time, the rules of the community had developed further along the lines we suggested in period Ia; several more kinds of offences appear, including what we might call social misbehaviour. Disrespect to a superior, especially a priest, earned a year of penance and of exclusion from the communal meal; deceit, bearing malice, or slander met with six months' penance. Misbehaviour during community sessions was especially reprehensible, and sleeping during the proceedings was punished by thirty days' penance, two days' penance being exacted from any member who left the session more than three times without adequate excuse. Spitting during the assembly, or foolish laughter earned thirty days' penance. We may be fairly sure, therefore, that if these community meetings were sometimes boring, they were never light-hearted – or not supposed to be – and the very best behaviour was demanded. As it happens, the very existence of such laws shows what kinds of behaviour did occasionally occur, for one does not, as a rule, establish a regulation for an offence which has not been committed nor seems likely to be committed. On this line of reasoning, we could deduce that misbehaviour at Qumran was not uncommon.

In addition to the growing list of offences, we have a new kind of punishment, namely penance. It is a pity that we are nowhere given a clue as to what this entailed. It may well have meant extra duties.

## Daily rituals

'Eat in common, pray in common, deliberate in common.' This is how the daily life of Qumran is summed up in the *Community Rule*. To this we should want to add 'work in common', but on this aspect of life the scrolls are silent. It is fortunate that we have Josephus to help us in this respect. He also tells us the daily rituals of the Essenes. They began the day by offering to the sun 'certain ancestral prayers, as if entreating him to rise'. The *Community Rule* puts it rather differently,

At the beginning of the dominion of light, and at its end . . .

At the beginning of the watches of darkness . . . and also at their end . . .

When the heavenly lights shine out from the dwelling place of Holiness . . .

And also when they return to the place of Glory . . . (1QS 10,1-3; *D.S.S.E.* p. 89).